Joyce’s first work for *Finnegans Wake* is a strange mixture of medieval material and modernist poetics. In this essay I analyze both Joyce’s neo-medievalist interest and his radical expression of medievality. In the first section I examine some of the reasons for Joyce’s rather surprising return, in 1923, to medieval subjects, characters, and stories, and I argue that a specifically Joycean understanding of “the medieval” – which for Joyce came to signify a poetic rather than a historical category – is consistently expressed in his early fictional and critical writings and colored, in 1923, by the contemporary writings of Joseph Bédier and Thomas Sturge Moore. In the second section I explore the literary techniques Joyce used in his early *Finnegans Wake* sketches to reinscribe medieval materials, ultimately arguing that Joyce drew upon and radicalized what Pound had named Laforgue’s “logopoeia”.

***

We should probably say that *Finnegans Wake* begins in the Middle Ages. In the spring of 1923, as he was beginning to write his last book, Joyce resurrected and expanded an unused paragraph, originally written for the “Cyclops” chapter of *Ulysses*, which dealt with the 12th-century High King of Ireland Roderick O’Conor. He then wrote a Hollywood-style version of the medieval tale of Tristan and Isolde and later that summer produced more sketches, two about the medieval saints Kevin and Patrick and another, “Mamalujo”, dealing with the medieval Irish historians known as the Four Masters. While Roderick (II.3) and the two saints (IV) remain high points of medievalism in the final text, the densest concentration of medieval references probably occurs in II.4, a chapter composed of the interweaving of Mamalujo and *Tristan*.
These facts, however, have disappointed critics on the bridge stretching from *Ulysses* to the *Wake*, for it is one thing to know that Joyce “turned to the medieval period” as he began to write again and quite another to say why. Interestingly, Joyce’s 1923 *Wake* vignettes neither mimic medieval forms or language *per se* (à la Pound) nor join the ongoing Gaelic revival (à la Yeats). Instead, the *Wake* sketches are *medieval* materials – themes, references, narratives, hagiographies, events – reinscribed in, or by, *modernist* aesthetics. It is the task of this essay to examine both parts of this mixture:

1) What did “medievality” mean to Joyce and why was it so attractive to him in 1923? We will see that not only did Joyce manifest a clearly developed idea of “the medieval” as early as *Stephen Hero*, but that he was also responsive to the musical, literary and philological engagements with medieval subjects in the air in the late 19th and early 20th centuries – in 1923 Joyce was peering deeply into the Celtic twilight itself, his bedside Bédier arguing that the oldest written versions of the *Tristan* legend dated to the last half of the 12th century. Yet Joyce was intrigued not...

1. Precise references to the reign of Roderick O’Conor, the English invasion, and the 12th century in general dot the chapter. Besides the recurring dates 1132 and 1169 A.D, one finds the Tailteann Fair (significant during the English invasion of Ireland in 1169): “tailturn horseshow” (*FW* 386.27); “middleaged widowers” (*FW* 390.14); “laudibiliter” (the Papal bull granting Ireland to England) (392.36); “the dynast days of old konning Soteric” (Old King Roderick) (393.07-8), etc.

2. David Hayman, A. Walton Litz, Geert Lernout, Vincent Deane, John Barger, Beryl Schlossman, Danis Rose and John O’Hanlon are among the many who have shaken the planks between *Ulysses* and the *Wake*, and their work is proof that to read the early *Wake* sketches one must also examine Joyce’s notebooks and methods of notetaking. In the case of the *Tristan* sketch, the last groundbreaking work to study its roots and evolution was David Hayman’s *The “Wake” in Transit*, Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1990, a book to which this essay owes a great debt.

3. Bédier writes: “It has been proved that the Celts related stories of Tristan before the French … we have merely the French poems, or derivatives from the French poems, to go by, the oldest of which date...